

## Effective Co-Parenting After Separation



### Highlights

Co-parenting is when former partners share in raising their children. This usually happens after a divorce or breakup. It means both parents have a hands-on role in raising the kids. When both parents cooperate and share responsibilities, kids do best.

### In This Article

- How you can best help your kids
- What the law says about co-parenting
- Writing a parenting plan or consent order
- Child support payments
- Resolving disputes
- Where to get more information about co-parenting

### How You Can Best Help Your Kids

Co-parenting works better for kids if you:

- Live close to your former partner, in the same town or area

Maintain consistency in rules and rewards  
Plan ahead for activities, holidays, and special events, such as birthdays  
Respect your child's right to have a relationship with the other parent  
Avoid angry or hurtful comments about your former partner

## **What the Law Says About Co-Parenting**

Family law typically states that both parents are responsible for the care and welfare of their children. In most cases, it is presumed that children benefit when both parents:

Cooperate  
Share equal parental responsibility

There are services available to help families manage relationship issues and provide guidance on reaching agreements regarding child care arrangements after separation.

## **Writing a Parenting Plan or Consent Order**

For co-parenting to work effectively, it is best to create a parenting plan. This is an agreement between both parents that does not require court involvement.

A parenting plan includes:

How parenting responsibilities are shared  
Living arrangements for the children  
Time allocation for each parent  
Holiday and special event planning  
Decision-making guidelines  
Education, healthcare, and financial responsibilities

A parenting plan is not legally enforceable. If a binding agreement is needed, parents can create a written consent order, which covers parenting and financial arrangements for the children. A consent order must be approved by the court but does not require parents to appear in court.

## **Child Support Payments**

A binding child support agreement is a formal agreement between both parents regarding financial support for their children. It can include cash payments or non-cash contributions such as school fees. Both parents should seek legal advice before entering into such an agreement.

Alternatively, a child support assessment can be requested to determine the amount of child support to be paid, based on both parents' incomes and family circumstances.

## **Resolving Disputes**

### **Family Relationship Centres**

If parents cannot agree on a parenting plan, they can seek assistance from:

- Family relationship services
- Relationship or family counselors
- Dispute resolution services

These options are generally more cost-effective, easier, and less stressful than going to court.

### **Family Court**

If disputes cannot be resolved through mediation, legal advice may be necessary. Parents can seek a court parenting order or a financial order. A court order is a legally binding arrangement created by the court. Before applying for such an order, attending family dispute resolution is usually required.

Parents may apply directly to the court for a parenting order if:

- The child is at risk of abuse or domestic violence
- One parent cannot co-parent due to physical or mental illness
- One parent is unable to participate in co-parenting due to location
- The situation is urgent

If an agreement cannot be reached, or if a parent refuses to comply with existing orders, court intervention may be necessary.

## **Tools and Assistance**

There are resources available to provide information and advice on:

Relationship breakdown and divorce

Single parenting

Blended families

Parents can also seek support from professionals such as child health specialists or family counselors.

Sources:

Family law resources

Various family relationship services

Legal aid organizations